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ABSTRACT

The work of war correspondents involves violence, danger, and drama; and what they endure to get a story is often as interesting as the actual news itself. Anglo-American fiction tends toward an ironic, even cynical, view of combat reporting that serves as a corrective to the notion, fostered in journalists' autobiographies, that war is fun. It also suggests that reporters are frauds and thrill seekers who callously profit from the misery of others, but who cannot continue in their jobs without losing their essential humanity. War reporting is depicted incisively by British writers in "Scoop" (1937) and "The Quiet American" (1955), and by American writers in "DelCorso's Gallery" (1983) and "The American Blues" (1984). Britain's long history of colonialism gave British writers a head start in questioning the ethics of war correspondence, but it was not until the Vietnam War that American writers began to seriously examine the darker aspects of combat reporting. The war correspondents of contemporary fiction doubt the sanity and morality of their role and see war as an unalleviated disaster. If they are to remain human, they must shed professional calm, stop treating the tragedy of war as just another news story, and take sides. (SRT)

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NUMBER NINETY-SEVEN

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HOWARD GOOD

The Image of War Correspondents in Anglo-American Fiction

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HOWARD GOOD

The Image of War Correspondents in Anglo-American Fiction

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Some men are trained to fight, and others are trained to write.
— Richard Harding Davis

THE WORK OF WAR CORRESPONDENTS involves violence, danger and drama, as they never tire of reminding us. "If you have not seen a battle," Herbert L. Matthews of the *New York Times* said, "your education has been somewhat neglected — for, after all, war has ever been one of the primary functions of mankind, and unless you see men fighting you miss something fundamental."[1] Every war since the American Civil War has produced a new crop of memoirs in which correspondents celebrate their own courage and cunning. They breathlessy tell how, to meet a deadline or to score a scoop, they braved gunfire, went for days without sleep or hot food, and outwitted censors and competitors. The assumption underlying the reminscences was succinctly expressed by the editors of the 1967 anthology, *How I Got That Story*: "What reporters go through to bring the world public news is often as interesting or even more interesting than the actual news stories themselves."[2]

To avoid appearing ghoulish, correspondents invariably deny in their memoirs that they craved the exictement of war. Webb Miller of the old United Press claimed that "a writer who detested war made the best war correspondent because the scenes impinged more vividly upon his senses."[3] The peace-loving Miller reported five wars on four continents and a dozen riots and revolutions. The impression that war correspondence is the most glamorous branch of journalism stems chiefly from memoirs, not from novels and short stories (some plays and movies are mentioned in the following pages, but theater and film generally lie

outside the boundaries of this study).[4] Anglo-American fiction tends toward an ironic, if not a downright cynical, view of combat reporting. It almost seems intended to serve as a necessary corrective to the insane notion, implicit in the colorful autobiographies of journalistic adventurers, that war is fun.

This is especially true of the fiction published in the past 40 years. The political complexity and moral confusion surrounding modern war have made it difficult to romanticize the combatants or the reporters who cover them. As the battlefield has expanded with improvements in the reach and killing power of weapons, an increasing amount of fiction has strived to capture the nightmarish quality of total war. Now that civilians are as likely as soldiers to be casualties, the fictional war correspondent is a witness returned from hell. Born in the age of adventure and romance, he has come to maturity in the age of nuclear destruction and mass death.

A certain few novels featuring war correspondents are justly famous — or infamous. Rudyard Kipling's *The Light That Failed* (1899) is widely scorned as an inferior book, the "mistaken work of a young man of genius."[5] On the other hand, columnist Marguerite Higgins advised Crosby Noyes, foreign editor of the *Washington Star News*, to "dip into Graham Greene's *A Quiet American* [sic] before going to Vietnam. When you get there, it will give you the creeps to see all those 'quiet Americans' of today."[6] Michael Herr, who reported the Vietnam War for *Esquire* magazine, said he often encountered scenes and characters straight out of Greene's 1955 novel and Evelyn Waugh's *Scoop* (1937).[7]

The many references to the potential of *Scoop* and *The Quiet American* to illuminate reality suggest that a thorough examination of the fiction about war correspondents is long overdue.[8] Norman Mailer has remarked that a novel "is, when it is good, the personification of a vision which will enable one to comprehend other visions better . . ."[9] Even when a novel is bad, however, it can have its uses, and not only for those who find enjoyment and escape in idealized heroes, outsized villians and contrived solutions to insoluble problems. For the literary investigator, it can provide clues to the stereotypes and myths by which a culture lives. The shifting image of war correspondents in fiction is a sort of index to the fantasies by which successive generations of readers have attempted to mitigate, interpret, or appeal the judgements of history.

"Social changes," George Santayana observed, "do not reach artistic expression until after their momentum is fully acquired and their other collateral effects are fully predetermined."[10] This helps explain why the first novel to portray journalists at the front, Kipling's *The Light That Failed*, was published as the so-called "golden age of war correspondence" was already drawing to a close.[11] That a genre centered on the war correspondent would develop within Anglo-American fiction was perhaps inevitable, for war correspondence had uniquely Anglo-American origins.

Only in Britain and the United States had democracy, urbanization and literacy combined by the middle of nineteenth century to create a popular audience for newspapers. By that time, too, British and

American papers possessed the technology — presses for faster and larger runs and the steamship and telegraph for more rapid comunication — to meet the demand for news.[12] The foundation for the rise of war correspondence was laid. All that was needed were wars to report, and they were not long in coming.

The Mexican-American War of 1846-47 was the first conflict to be regularly covered by the daily press. American reporters rode with the troops of Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott. Their papers spent enormous sums on pony expresses, special trains, steamships and the infant telegraph in an effort to overtake the government mails and score scoops.[13] However, the man recognized as the "father of war correspondence" was not an American. He was Irish-born William Howard Russell, a "special" for the *Times* of London who accompanied a British military expedition to the Crimea in 1854. Russell's descriptive letters from the front were something new in journalism and astonished the British public, which previously had to be content with sketchy official communiques. His dispatches were so vivid and stirring that readers felt as if they were transported to the battlefield, where swords and helmets flashed in the sun, and troops moved in serried ranks or formed squares to meet the enemy's charges.[14] Russell learned journalism in the pen-and-paper era, and never quite adjusted to the spread of the telegraph, or "lightning line." During the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, Mowbry Morris, the manager of the *Times*, was forced to beg him to "use the telegraph freely" after the paper was repeatedly scooped.[15] Russell's practice of sending a long, detailed account of a battle by ordinary mail or special messenger had become antiquated in the Civil War.

American newspaper readers, passionately interested in the life-and-death struggle of the Union, wanted every morning at breakfast stories of the battles fought the day before. War correspondence was transformed into a marathon race. Reporters schemed to be the fastest to gather the news and the first to reach the telegraph office with it. The intense competition drove them to incredible feats of endurance and ingenuity, as well as to bribery, subterfuge, plagiarism and fakery.[16]

Adopting American methods of speed and organization, a close-knit, largely British group of correspondents came to monopolize war reporting from 1870 to 1900. The course of empire kept them steadily employed. "In those days of England's colonial wars," wrote Frederick Palmer, no stranger to war correspondence himself despite being an American, "a regular war correspondent was considered as necessary a member of a great British newspaper's staff as an expert in finance, sports, music or the drama. With every alarm of war he sniffed the battle from afar and looked over his campaign outfit to see that all was in order for prompt action."[17]

It was the golden age of war correspondence. Daring reporters galloped horses and rode trains through the mountains and valleys of the Balkans, the frontiers of India, the plateaus of Central Asia, the plains of Zululand and Natal, the deserts of Egypt and the Sudan, and the jungles of Cuba and the Philippines. Amid their adventures in exotic lands, they never stopped to analyze the greed and racism behind imperial con-

quests. Their first-person stories focused instead on the pageantry and excitement of war, and thrilled the stay-at-homes (or, as historian Phillip Knightley preferred to put it, "pandered to the bloodthirsty taste of the age"[18]).

After the turn of the century, the military would awaken to the power of the popular press to shape public opinion, and so would reduce the freedom of correspondents to wander where they willed. In the Russo-Japanese War of 1904, foreign newsmen were kept cooped up in Tokyo hotels far from the frontlines, and their dispatches subjected to strict censorship. Some correspondents thought the restrictions peculiarly Oriental. Richard Harding Davis, who covered the war for *Collier's* magazine, said reporters endured "six months of deceit, of broken pledges, of unnecessary humiliations, of petty unpoliteness from a half-educated, half-bred, conceited, and arrogant people . . ."[19] But as Davis and his colleagues found out in the Balkan wars and World War I, other armies were equally ready to set censors and conducting officers on them. As a witness to these developments during his career, Russell had remarked that if he were the "father of war correspondents," then he was the "miserable parent of a luckless tribe."[20] And yet the assault on reporters was not so much a break with the past as it was the flaring of a long-smoldering resentment. Since their first appearance on the battlefield, their status had been uncertain, and their work suspect. The heavily ironic portrayal of war correspondents in fiction was influenced by these tensions, which originated with politicians and the military, but which gradually seeped outward to affect the public at large.

The idea of a correspondent accompanying an army into the field was revoluntionary when Russell acted on it in the Crimea. One indignant member of Parliament wanted to know "what right a newspaper reporter has to go anywhere as early as anybody else, or to know anything that has not already reached official ears." Russell keenly felt his lack of a fixed and recognized role. "I was a very fly in amber," he recalled. The army ignored his requests for food, shelter and transport, and he was forced to scrounge for them on his own. On the march to the battle of Alma, a British general confronted him and asked who he was and what he was doing there. After Russell explained as best he could, the general declared: "By _____, Sir, I'd soon as see the devil! What on earth do you know of this kind of work, and what will you do when we go into action?"[21]

Journalists fared as badly in the Civial War. "War correspondence is a thankless office," Junius Henri Browne, a special for the *New York Tribune*, lamented. "The Correspondent may do, and dare, and suffer; but who yields him credit? If he die in the service by disease and casualty, it is thought by many that he had no business there." Browne added that "a gentleman cannot be a Correspondent without detracting from his dignity or abrogating a portion of his pride." So far as military regulations went, the reporter was "a kind of camp follower or hanger-on."[22] Officers treated him with bristling hostility. To escape censorship and worse, he sometimes stole into camp disguised as a nurse or clerk.[23] The physical and emotional demands of the job were such that only a handful

or correspondents lasted out the war.[24]

Even when reporters were offered what both Russell and Browne had sought, official recognition, it was given grudgingly, and primarily with the aim of better controlling them. "It is an axiom of war," M.L. Stein said, "that some commanders fear the press more than the enemy."[25] During World War I, correspondents were housed in chateaus and deluxe hotels and allowed to dress like officers, but they also were bombarded with propaganda and beset by censors. Richard Harding Davis became so frustrated with the situation that he gave up reporting the war and went home. "Now, with every army the correspondent is as popular as a floating mine, as welcome as the man dropping bombs from an air-ship," he complained. "The hand of every one is against him. 'Keep out! This means you!' is the way they greet him." He was angry to see that newspaper readers, like the military, regarded the correspondent "as a prying busybody, as a sort of spy," who should be suppressed.[26]

Despite the prevelance of wars large and small in the second-half of the twentieth century, no army has sought or relished the company of correspondents. Marguerite Higgins, who covered the Korean War for the *New York Herald Tribune*,, wrote that General Douglas MacArthur's press chief treated jounalists as "natural enemies. He couldn't get rid of us completely, but he could make our reporting life very difficult."[27] In Vietnam, while there was no overt censorship, officers did not always welcome correspondents or understand their function " . . . sooner or later," Michael Herr said, "all of us heard one version or another of 'My Marines are winning this war, and you people are losing it for us in your papers,' often spoken in an almost friendly way, but with the teeth shut tight behind the smiles. It was creepy, being despised in such casual offhand ways."[28]

In 1983 the Pentagon drew a lesson from the British invasion of the Falkland Islands and banned reporters from an American invasion of Grenada. The news blackout met with widespread public approval.[29] But journalists were livid, and in response to their protests, a review panel was appointed to propose guidelines for press coverage of surprise combat operations. The panel's recommendations, released in August 1984, called for maximum coverage "consistent with the military security and safety of U.S. forces;" that is, correspondents might still be barred from the battlefield.[30] For his entire history, then, the war correspondent has been a controversial figure. His right to report from the front and his patriotism have been questioned — by the public that he purports to serve, as well as by the military. When he claims, which he often does, that his calling is dynamic and significant, he may be attempting to quiet his own doubts and to appease authority. Anglo-American fiction, in any case, has treated these claims ironically and depicted the war correspondent as a thrill freak, a ghoul, a fraud. In this, it has merely confirmed what most people already believed.

While irony runs like a red thread through the fiction, the early portrayals of war correspondents also contained intimations of romance and glamor. It was only after the shocking slaughter of World War I that a full-blown satire on war reporting, Evelyn Waugh's *Scoop*, appeared

and added a dimension of moral outrage to the ironic humor practiced by previous authors. The genre underwent another transformation with America's blundering involvement in Vietnam. Wrestling with the ethical complexities and emotional costs of a new kind of war, Graham Greene, Philip Caputo and Ward Just left off satirizing the press and infused their novels with an unrelievedly tragic tone.

Under the pressure of history, the image of war correspondents in fiction has been continually evolving. The century or almost, of evolution falls into three stages, each of which will be examined in turn. First, a look at the portrayal of correspondents as knights-errant, then as fools and liars, and finally as witnesses sickened by the horrors of wars and driven to abandon all semblance of objectivity. It must be stressed, however, that this organization, while justified by the material, is still a tool of literary analysis, a convenience, and that in reality the stages overlap to some degree. There are foreshadowings of Waugh's *Scoop* (1937) in Richard Harding Davis' farce, *The Galloper* (1906), as there are echoes of Rudyard Kipling's discredited romanticism in Caputo's *DelCorso's Gallery* (1983) and Just's *The American Blues* (1984). The fictional correspondent of old who went to war in search of glory and adventure is the father of today's fictional correspondent who wanders like a grieving ghost between wounded earth and burning sky.

The War Correspondent As Knight-Errant

. . . to die out here, with a lancehead as big as a shovel through me, will meet my views better than the gradual sinking into the grave which is the lot of so many.

— Edmond O'Donovan, British war correspondent, killed in the Sudan in 1882

Rudyard Kipling never saw a battle, but *The Light That Failed* captures the adventurous spirit that animated the golden age of war correspondence. Its protagonist, Dick Heldar, is a young illustrator who joins a British column marching to the relief of Gordon in Khartoum." . . . there was a row, so I came," he simply states. No more explanation was needed at a time when a feeling of energy and excitement was sweeping the white man's world and inspiring visions of discovering ancient empires or of establishing new ones in the unexplored reaches of Asia and Africa.[31] Dick must endure all the dangers and deprivations of the common soldier. But he does better than endure them. In hand-in-hand fighting with the dervishes, he plays an heroic part:

> Dick was conscious that somebody had cut him violently across his helmet, that he had fired his revolver into a black, foam-flecked face which forthwith ceased to bear any resemblance to a face and that Torpenhow had gone down under an Arab whom he had tried to "collar low," and was turning over and over with his captive, feeling for his eyes. . . It was to Torpenhow that Dick turned by instinct. The representative of the Central Southern Syndicate had

> shaken himself clear of his enemy, and rose, wiping his thumb on his trousers. The Arab, both hands to his forehead, screamed aloud, then snatched up a spear and rushed at Torpenhow, who was panting under the shelter of Dick's revolver. Dick fired twice, and the man dropped limply. His upturned face lacked one eye.[32]

Several months after his return to England, Dick loses his sight as the result of his sword wound. Kept by his blindness from accompanying his colleagues on a new campaign against the Mahdi, he sinks into morbid self-pity. He is condemned to a "living death" until he conceives the idea of catching up with the expedition. Arriving at the British camp as the dervishes launch a dawn atttack, he says to Torpenhow, "Put me, I pray, in the forefront of battle." Those are his last words. He receives the "crowning mercy of a kindly bullet through his head" and dies in the arms of his best friend.[33] The battle pieces in *The Light That Failed* are thrilling in a comic-book sort of way, but the novel as a whole is dull and plodding, weighed down by what one critic has called a "savage misogyny."[34] Dick loves Maisie to the point of obsession (it cannot be true love in Victorian literature if it is not obsessive). She, though, is a monster of egoism and repays his devotion with cruelty. In direct contrast is Dick's friendship with the veteran correspondent Torpenhow. They grew close while traveling with the relief column across the desert, "for they ate from the same dish, they shared the same water-bottle, and, most binding of all, their mails went off together."[35] When Dick is struck blind, it is Torpenhow, not Maisie, who is there to comfort him in a scene full of homoerotic overtones:

> Torpenhow thrust out a large and hairy paw from the long chair. Dick clutched it tightly, and in half an hour had fallen asleep. Torpenhow withdrew his hand, and stooping over Dick, kissed him lightly on the forehead, as men do sometimes kiss a wounded comrade in the hour of death, to ease his departure.[36]

Kipling's war correspondents, having passed through the valley of the shadow together, understand and appreciate each other as no woman ever could. They are members of a tight, little fraternity, with its own rules of trust, its own rituals of affection. Many features of the fiction about war reporting have changed over the years, but this one has remained constant. The most genuine and fulfilling relationships are always those among the correspondents themselves. In Philip Caputo's *DelCorso's Gallery* (1983), combat photographer Nick DelCorso pours out his soul to his colleagues as he dare not to his wife, who threatens a nervous breakdown every time he leaves on an assignment. For Dick Heldar, war is a flight from unhappiness and responsibility, and his death on the sands of the Sudan is gloriously romantic, the ultimate escape from the workaday nineteenth century. In Stephen Crane's potboiler, *Active Service* (1899), the battlefield is similarly a place of romance and release for Rufus Coleman of the *New York Eclipse*.

Coleman uses the Greco-Turkish War of 1897 as an excuse to follow his fiancee to Greece. Her father, a professor of ancient Greek, has carried her there in an attempt to quash her engagement to a "mere journalist."

But when the professor, his wife and daughter, and some students become lost along the battle-torn frontier with Turkey, only the resourceful Coleman can save them. "He was on active service, an active service of the heart, and he felt that he was a strong man ready to conquer difficulty even as the olden heroes conquered difficulty."[37] Dodging army patrols, artillery barrages and angry peasants, Coleman finally leads the group to safety and wins the grateful professor's consent to marry his daughter. Crane embroidered his experience as a war correspondent in Greece to create *Active Service*. Richard Harding Davis loosely based the characters in his short story, "The Derelict (1902), on reporters who rushed with him to cover the Spanish-American War. Indeed, there were whispers when the story was first published that the title character was a thinly disguised portrait of Crane, who went to Cuba for Pulitzer's *New York World*.[38]

There are two kinds of correspondents in Davis' newspaperdom, sour hacks and drunken geniuses. Keating is an example of the former. He has "worn the collar of the Consolidated Press for so long" that he has no enthusiasm left. "A board meeting — a mine disaster — an Indian uprising — it was all one to Keating. he collected his facts and his salary." Even the Spanish-American War, an assignment most reporters would consider the "chance of a lifetime," cannot arouse his interest.[39] What little energy Keating has, he reserves for despising and tormenting Charles Channing, a "sort of derelict" who has been fired from "pretty nearly every paper in the country," but who has "genius" for descriptive writing.[40] Channing has made his way to Cuba in hopes of reporting the war, only to be stranded without job or money. No paper will hire him. His drunkenness and unreliability are too well known.

Ironically, Keating is the one passed out from drink when the Spanish navy attempts to run the American blockade of Santiago harbor. Despite being racked by fever and chills, Channing substitutes for him, filing a 68-page dispatch that is hailed at home as the "only piece of literature the war has produced." The story, however, is credited to Keating, who is heaped with honors. Channing remains penniless and jobless — and chivalrous. He has another reporter relay to Keating the message, "It's all right."[41] A derelict by appearance and reputation, he is actually a knight of the pencil, a poet of the news. Such romanticism went out of style, though not out of existence, amid the agonies of World War I. "Every war is ironic," literary historian Paul Fussell has written, "because every war is worse than expected. . . But the Great War was more ironic than any before or since."[42] The reason was that its beginning was more innocent.

The small imperialistic wars of the late nineteenth century were, as George Orwell pointed out, hardly wars at all by modern standards.[43] Thus, no one was prepared for the immense slaughter that was about to occur. Nor could anyone imagine the thousands of miles of trenches — sufficient to circle the globe — that would become the graveyard of a generation. Everyone thought that the war would be "an affair of great marches and great battles, quickly decided."[44] Instead it dragged on, offensive after bloody offensive, year after bloody year, and faith in pro-

gress and glory and the other large, abstract words seemed to vanish into the abyss that had opened between the idealization of war and its nightmarish reality. But though the flame of romance flickered, it did not blow out. Fiction continued to present war correspondents who dashed happily, even high-mindedly, to the latest field of carnage. The hero of *Jaffery*, a 1915 novel by British author William J. Locke, calls journalism a "sacred affair." He says it is his job to "visit the dark places of the earth and keep the world informed of history in the making."[46] As late as the 1940s and 1950s, fictional correspondents were still managing to talk with a straight face about the heaven-born mission of jounalism, and to have thrilling adventures while all around them lesser men were suffering and dying.

Two American novels about Civil War newsmen, Elswyth Thane's *Yankee Stranger* (1944) and Bruce Lancaster's *Roll Shenandoah* (1956), illustrate this. Thane's hero, Cabot Murray, is "very tall, dark, and handsome, with a cleft in his chin and the devil in his eye" — the stuff adolescent girls' fantasies are made of. When he speaks about his work, however, he sounds like a lecturer in a beginning journalism course. "I believe in the power and freedom of the Press," he intones, "I believe that reporting a war is a solemn responsibility . . ."[46] Lancaster's hero, Ellery Starr, joins the *New York Tribune* after being invalided out of the Union army. "If I can do the work," he explains, "if what I write comes out in a paper that gets to as many people the *Tribune* does, I feel it'll be really worthwhile. I'll be doing something for the war." He aims to set down events "fairly and impartially," and succeeds so well in his account of the burning of a town by Confederate troops that even their skeptical commander must admit, "Yes . . . that's the way it was . . ."[47]

While Murray and Starr spout fine sentiments about the role of the press, neither finishes the war as a correspondent. Murray, concluding that "the less said about the war the better, and the thing was to get it over," becomes a Yankee spy.[48] Starr takes charge of an artillery battery in the heat of battle, after which General Philip Sheridan personally tells him: "Wire your paper. Get a uniform. You're Captain Starr again."[49] Reporting a war may be exciting and important, but it is evidently not as exciting and important as fighting one.

It is easy to laugh at such novels and their impossibly upright heroes. Satires on war correspondence are often not half as funny — unless, that is, one finds funny the notion that journalism is war conducted by other means.

The War Correspondent as Fool and Liar

News is what a chap who doesn't care much about anything wants to read.
— Evelyn Waugh, *Scoop*

Irony, as already mentioned, has been an element in the fictional protrayal of war correspondents from the beginning. Kipling's *The Light That Failed* is alternately a romance and a satire. The young author who exalted Dick Heldar's death on the battlefield described the "New and

Honourable Fraternity of war correspondents "in a voice dripping with sarcasm."[50]

> With the soldiers sweated and toiled the correspondents of the newspapers, and they were almost as ignorant as their companions. But it was above all things necessary that England at breakfast should be amused and thrilled and interested, whether Gordon lived or died, or half the British army went to pieces in the sands. The Soudan [sic] campaign was a picturesque one, and lent itself to vivid word-painting. Now and again a "Special" managed to get slain — which was not altogether a disadvantage to the paper that employed him — and more often the hand-to-hand nature of fighting allowed of miraculous escapes which were worth telegraphing home at eighteenpence the word.[51]

A more subtle form of mockery colors Stephen Crane's "The Lone Charge of William B. Perkins" from *Wounds in the Rain* (1900), his collection of short stories and reminiscences of the Spanish-American War. Befuddled with whisky, a correspondent mistakes in the thick of battle a dried palm branch for an enemy soldier and attacks it single-handedly. By the time he realizes his error, he is "Raked, enfiladed, flanked, surrounded, and overwhelmed . . ." The reporter only saves himself by hiding in an old, rusty steamboiler that happens to be lying in some nearby bushes. He had arrived in Cuba "with no information of war, and no particular rapidity of mind for acquiring it," but this brush with death shatters his illusions that war is a good and glorious thing. We last see him boarding the press boat "wearing a countenance of poignant thoughtfulness."[52]

Crane, whatever his genius for fiction, is generally conceded to have been a mediocre journalist. Richard Harding Davis was the foremost American war correspondent of the day. With his matinee-idol looks and real-life adventures, Davis seemed the very personification of romance, a hero of out the pages of a women's novel.[53] Yet he was fully capable of laughing at his public image, and nowhere is his droll sense of his own limitations — and journalism's — better expressed than in his farce, *The Galloper*, which opened at the Garden Theatre in New York on January 22, 1906.

Its wildly convoluted plot defies summarizing, but it is set in the Greco-Turkish War, and the cast includes British and American newsmen who are given to bragging about how many servants and pieces of luggage they bring on campaigns. Davis portrays them as cheerful victims of the romantic myths surrounding war correspondence (little matter that he was partly responsible for creating those myths in the first place). The one level-headed character in the play, the Athens bureau chief of the *New York Republic*, fumes at the foolishness and vanity of the journalists at the front:

> *Three months ago*, I cabled the *Republic* for five correspondents, and they have sent me five reporters who had never been farther from Park Row than the Battery; not one of them in his life had ever used a wire except to telephone to Shanley's for a table. But as soon as they reached Athens they put on revolvers and khaki

yachting caps and called themselves war correspondents. And then they lost themselves in those mountains and they haven't found the Greek army and the whole Greek army can't find them.[54]

Davis' reporters, for all their posturing, are basically harmless. It took World War I, and the grim prospect of a second, to bring forth Evelyn Waugh's *Scoop* (1937) and its vision of correspondents as blindly competitive, morally obtuse and criminally negligent. Waugh covered the Italian invasion of Ethopia in 1935 for the *London Daily Mail*. Though he sent back little news and was eventually fired, he saw enough of war and war correspondents to be shocked and disillusioned.[55] As Corker of Universal News confides to Waugh's protagonist, William Boot:

"You know, when I first started in journalism, I used to think that foreign correspondents spoke every language under the sun and spent their lives studying international conditions. Brother, look at us! On Monday afternoon I was in East Sheen breaking the news to a widow of her husband's death leap with a champion girl cyclist — the wrong widow as it turned out . . Next day the Chief has me in and says, 'Corker, You're off to Ishmaelia.' 'Out of town job?' I asked. 'East Africa,' he said, just like that, 'pack your traps.' 'What's the story?' I asked. 'Well', he said, 'a lot of niggers are having a war. I don't see anything in it myself, but the other agencies are sending feature men so we've got to do something . . .' 'What are they having a war about?' I asked. 'That's for you to find out,' he said, but I haven't found out yet. Have you?"[56]

Identity cards issued to the correspondents who converge on Ishmaelia were orginally printed for the registration of prostitutes. In Waugh's eyes, the press is more than inane; it is corrupt and dangerous. The paper for which William works, aptly named the *Beast*, stands for "strong mutually antagonistic governments everywhere. Self-sufficiency at home, self-assertion abroad."[57]

Something of Waugh's savage spirit entered *Tell Sparta* (1945) by A. C. Sedgwick, who was a *New York Times* foreign correspondent. The newspapermen in the novel are typically louts. "I'm not a journalist," one declares, "only just a plain reporter." He dismisses the work of an esteemed colleague with the words: "Who in hell reads that learned stuffed shirt except a bunch of moss-grown college professors? A guy with sports and crime training could lick that guy on any story, with his hands tied."[58]

At the root of the satire and irony directed at war correspondents in fiction is their perceived inability or unwillingness to tell the truth. Journalism appeals to the emotions, not to the intellect. "Our business . . .," a reporter in *The Light That Failed* says, "is to do absurd and impossible things — generally with no reason whatever except to amuse the public."[59] An editor in Will Levington Comfort's *Red Fleece* (1915) cautions a young correspondent leaving for the front that the ugly realities of war are unpopular with "our kind of press." He goes on to explain:

" . . . we are taking our bread, and its cake, too, from a paper that expects us to exploit the orthodox heroics. The pity and arocious sham of it all has its side. But the fact still remains its side does not

> furnish the stuff that American newspapers pay men and cable tolls to furnish."[60]

Wire service reporter Harry Bolton makes the same point, if more crudely, in Philip Caputo's *DelCorso's Gallery* (1983). After taping the sounds of street fighting in Beirut for a radio story, he says,". . .the stations buy this garbage because they know that out there on the freeway some fat-assed tax attorney is going to get a little tickle in his crotch when he hears *rat-a-tat-tat* on his AM."[61]

Being primarily entertainers, correspondents have little incentive to discover for themselves or to relate to the people at home what war is really like. The troops respond to the misleading reporting with helpless anger. "What do you fellows know about it?" a soldier rages at a group of correspondents in Richard Harding Davis' novella, *The Deserter* (1917). "You write about it, about the 'brave lads in the trenches;' but what do you know about the trenches? What you've seen from automobiles. That's all."[62] And a "tommy" in "May Margaret" (1918), a short story by British author Alfred Noyes, complains:

> ". . . I never seen the real fax put in the papers yet. . . . All this poytry! (he spat into a shell-hole) making pictures out of it . . . If what they say is true, why in hell do they want the war ever to stop at all? P'rhaps if it went on for ever we should all of us learn the blood beauty of it, and keep on learning it till there wasn't any one left"[63]

According to Anglo-American fiction, war correspondence consists of putting thrills before truth, and expedience before ethics. Competition rules the reporters. They lie, bribe, cheat and steal to gain a momentary advantage in the race for news. Dick Heldar of *The Light That Failed* gets a telegraph clerk drunk, and while the man lies blissfully unconscious on the floor, makes a copy of an exclusive story by a correspondent of an opposing press association. He then brings the duplicate to Torpenhow, who builds an "excellent descriptive article from his rival's riotous waste of words." They justify their skulduggery with the remark," . . . all's fair in love and war correspondence."[64]

If reporters cannot steal their stories, they may fake them. The most outrageous example of faking is depicted, not unexpectedly, in *Scoop*. Wenlock Jakes, the highest paid correspondent in the United States, was once sent to cover a revolution in a Balkan capital. He overslept on the train, woke up at the wrong station, did not know the difference, got out, went straight to the hotel, and cabled a dispatch about "barricades in the streets, flaming churches, machine guns answering the rattle of his typewriter as he wrote, a dead child, like a broken doll, spreadeagled in the deserted road below his window. . ." After his story made headlines around the world, every special correspondent in Europe rushed to the new revolution. The country seemed quiet when they arrived, but with Jakes filing a thousand words of blood and thunder a day, they were loathe to say that. So they chimed in, and within a week, an honest-to-God revolution had erupted. "There's the power of the press for you," Corker drily observed.[65]

Later fiction reinforced the image of war correspondents as an

unscrupulous and lazy breed. The journalists in *Tell Sparta* sit safely in Budapest and write "eyewitness" accounts of the Italian invasion of Greece. In Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* (1955), a U.S. official in Saigon praises a reporter's story about Road 66 — "what did you call it? Highway to Hell" — only to have the reporter reply: "Do you think I'd really go near their stinking highway? Stephen Crane could describe a war without seeing one. Why shouldn't I?"[66]

Of all the obstacles that might stand in the way of correspondents truthfully reporting a war, none gets more emphasis in memoirs and less mention in fiction than military censorship. Frederick Palmer, who gave up war correspondence to become chief censor of the American Expeditionary Force in World War I, found out too late that "War censorship smothers truth in cotton wool, behind the opaque curtain which is guarded by a soldier's bayonet."[67] World War II correspondents learned the same bitter lesson. "I tried to describe for people back in America, most of whom knew nothing about war firsthand, a little bit of what I had seen and heard and smelled," Associated Press reporter Robert St. John said. "I tried to do it honestly and graphically. But the censors slashed all the honesty out of my stories. All the vividness. All the truth."[68]

By virtually ignoring the existence of wartime censorship, fiction writers have denied the press its one legitimate excuse for false reporting. Sloppy, sensational journalism has been made to seem entirely the fault of correspondents and the thrill-crazy public they serve. Only the two novels about Civil War newsmen take any notice of the censorship problem. After officials in Washington order the mail from correspondents with the army impounded, Ellery Starr of *Roll Shenandoah* (1956) sets up, as reporters for Northern newspapers actually did, a special pony express to deliver his dispatches. On the other hand, Cabot Murray of *Yankee Stranger* (1944), who has "more sense of responsibility than many of his colleagues," quietly accepts regulation — queer behavior for a "responsible" correspondent in an era that prized exclusive news.[69]

Even when free of censors, reporters may be unable to write the truth. "War," Stephen Crane said in *Wounds in the Rain* (1900), "is simply life, and an expression of life can always evade us. We never tell life, one to another, although sometimes we think we can." This is a discovery that Crane forces on the luckless corresondent of the short story, "God Rest Ye, Merry Gentlemen." The Spanish-American War is "too colossal" for him to put into words. Battle are fought, but he sends no stories to his New York paper. The patience of his editors finally snaps, and he is recalled from Cuba in disgrace.[70]

In Philip Caputo's *DelCorso's Gallery* (1983), a reporter covering the Lebanese civil war — a "dress rehearsal for the collapse of modern civilization" — is likewise baffled in his attempts to record what he witnesses.[71] The conventions and cliches of newswriting cannot help him where he has gone:

> . . . Bolton tried to rough out a radio story in his notebook; but the bangs and crashes and Sami's shouts locked up his mental gears. Fragments of thoughts and phrases buzzed inside his head like

shrapnel. *Bizarre scene here at Beirut's Holiday Inn . . . Phalangist Christians now under fire . . . PFLP in Phoenicia across street . . . but just moments ago . . . PFLP and PDFLP in gun battle with each other . . . explain why . . . Why? . . . Two factions dispute over calling a cease fire with Christians . . . Can't make sense of this . . . Meanwhile, inside Phalangist stronghold saw a female member of Christian militia . . . No, female sniper . . . magazine issue with ladies' fashions for guerrilla warfare . . . Shit, nobody will believe this . . .*[72]

". . . I had a skull overflowing with facts — untainted, innocent — and none of them described the war. . . ," the narrator of Ward Just's *The American Blues* (1984) confesses. A former correspondent in Vietnam, he has yet to find the words that will convey the special tragedy of the time and place. "You could not share it or transfer it or communicate it in any recognizable form," he says. "It was yours alone, your own shadow, a doppelganger, present night and day."[73] He and the other reporters who grow suddenly and strangely inarticulate have stumbled on the real war behind the glorious war of legend, and their training and experience fail them before the vastness, the mystery, the horror of it. The choice they face ever after as journalists is neither salutary nor simple, for they must choose not between truth and falsehood, but between falsehood and silence.

The War Correspondent as Witness

. . . I went to cover the war and the war covered me. . .

— Michael Herr

The golden age of war correspondence coincided with the age of short-range warfare. A correspondent could see the whole battlefield at a glance, and it offered thrilling sights — bright uniforms, fluttering flags and reckless cavalry charges. War still resembled something of a splendid pagaent. Armistices were called to bury the dead, courtesy was extended to the "other fellow," and battles conveniently ended at dusk.

World War I brought a revolutionary change, both in combat and combat reporting. Dash and daring no longer won battles. Now brave troops leaped from trenches, advanced across no man's land toward an unseen enemy, and were mowed down in their thousands. The appearance of the machine gun — which "would keep a stream of bullets in the air so dense that no one could walk upright in front of a machine-gunner's position without being hit" — had industrialized the act of killing " . . . what almost all the soldiers of the First World War . . . testify to," military historian John Keegan has noted, "is their sense of littleness, almost of nothingness, of their abandonment in a physical wilderness, dominated by vast impersonal forces from which even such normalities as the passage of time had been eliminated."'[74]

The mechanization that took the romance out of war also took it out of war correspondence. Talk of the profession being "doomed" became

common. One writer gave a long list of reasons why the war correspondent "has seen his last fight:"[75]

> Both armies are invisible, generals are taciturn, generalissimos spend more time at the end of field-telegraphs and field-telephones than they do on prancing steeds. Heaps of dead are never to be found owing to the distance which separates soldiers in the modern fighting-line, and to the vast extent of the modern battle-front.[76]

Because war had "ceased to be gay thing," it was thought that the war correspondent, even if he did not literally disappear, would never know the adventures and feats that his predecessors, newspaper legends like William Howard Russell and Archibald Forbes, had known.[77]

Bloody as the Great War was, cities and homes outside the combat areas had been spared. But World War II ushered in aerial bombing that obliterated cities and homes overnight. Correspondent William L. Shirer, accompanying Nazi troops on their lightning march through Holland, Belgium and France, was appalled at the destruction wrought by modern weapons. He could only exclaim in his diary. "What guns and bombs do to houses and people . . . to towns, cities, bridges, railroad stations and tracks and trains, to universities and ancient noble buildings, to enemy soldiers, trucks, tanks, and horses caught along the way!"[78] The traditional distinction between soldiers and civilians, between battlefront and homefront, had blurred. Herbert L. Matthews of the *New York Times*, who remembered with nostalgia what war correspondence was like before the coming of total war, said "the joys of battle and campaigning have been and are, in ever-increasing measure, dissolving into suffering . . ."[79]

Fictional reporters reacted to modern combat with no less dismay than real ones. "It's different from anything I knew," a correspondent in the World War I novel, *Red Fleece* declares. "It's so damn businesslike. Something's come over the world. War was more like a picnic before. I never saw it like this. I believe we've gone crazy."[80] In the World War II novel, *Tell Sparta*, only a torrent of dread images out of nightmare and madness can serve to describe battle:

> You heard children beating on a drum that was the sky. You heard them blowing on trumpets, wheezing and whining. You heard the doors of the asylum swung open like the gates of the Bastille and you heard a million million pattering feet going upstairs and along galleries in the sky, and a million million homicidal maniacs parading the street of a limitless city with carving knives, and in nightgowns, carrying banners, and women with starving babies in their arms, and the children, and their mothers in bare feet, and all of them beating on the sky, as on a drum, and tearing out their hair . . .[81]

By the time America's crusade in Vietnam was being depicted, newsmen in fiction had discovered that "you were responsible for everything you saw as you were for everything you did."[82] Watching the crusade decay into chaos and killing, they were torn between their jobs and their compassion.

Vietnam, the narrator of *The American Blues* says, is "the place where

modern American history begins."[83] The war taught Americans that they cannot do everything, that their government was capable of lying and murder, that power corrupts. They emerged from the quagmire less innocent and confident. "Vietnamized America was not a proud country," Thomas B. Morgan recently wrote in *Esquire* magazine. "In defeat it was ashamed."[84] Phillip Knightley has said Vietnam marked a turning point in the history of war correspondence, "for it was there that correspondents began seriously to question the ethics of their business."[85] It is the nature of journalism that the deeper the agony, the bigger headlines — the worse the news, the more the reporters in Vietnam profited. The terrible irony of the situation was not lost on all of them. "Perhaps the greatest difference between covering a war and fighting it," Morgan speculated, "is that, as a correspondent, you don't have to kill anybody. But this only makes the guilt less obvious, not easier to bear."[86]

The stories reporters sent back from Vietnam were full of evil tidings. There was no way to romanticize American soldiers who shot men, women and children in ditches. The daily chronicling of tragedy and folly did not endear the press to the public. In any other war, Michael Herr said, Hollywood would have made movies about the intrepid correspondents at the front. "But," he added, "Vietnam is awkward, everybody knows how awkward, and if people don't want to hear about it, you know they're not going to pay money to sit there in the dark and have it brought up."[87]

Part of what made Vietnam "awkward" was that nothing and no one was outside the killing zone. It stretched from the South to the North, from the rice paddies to the sidewalks of Saigon. "War reporters did wade around in blood up to our knees," Charles Mohr of the *New York Times* recalled. "We saw a lot of people's legs blown off."[88] Peter Arnett, who covered the war for the Associated Press, discussed the psychological toll the violence and bloodshed took on correspondents:

> . . . I think the press corps suffered mass Vietnam stress, and trauma, too, when they came out of there. I think people who'd been in Vietnam a year or more were basically traumatized by what they saw. It affected their thinking and their activities afterwards. Some newsmen committed suicide . . . Some lost their careers. I'm sure there's been a greater percentage of failure after Vietnam than after World War II . . . It was an unpopular war and the press was affected as the troops were.[89]

So Vietnam did not necessarily harden reporters to the misfortunes of war. The special ghastliness of the conflict may, in fact, have sensitized them ". . . people who have spent really quite a lot of time as serious professional war correspondents," Mohr said, "do tend to get fed up, or at least recognize that it's not a spectator sport and it's not all that ennobling. . . "[90]

The pain, doubt and disillusionment of correspondents in the Vietnam War era are reflected Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* (1955), Philip Caputo's *DelCorso's Gallery* (1983) and Ward Just's *The American Blues* (1984). The protagonists of these novels are sickened by

the suffering they witness. Their consciences cry out against their role as professional observers at the "peep-show of misery."[91] They come to identify with the victims of war. It is both their downfall and their redemption.

There are other works of fiction in which newsmen become actors in the drama of history. The heroes of *Yankee Stranger* (1944) and *Roll Shenandoah* (1956) switch from reporting the Civil War to fighting it. And Wolfe, the roving correspondent of British author James Alridge's *Of Many Men* (1946), quits journalism at the end of World War II to take up arms against the facist government in Spain. "It isn't Spain itself," he says. "This is the whole thing. This is the critical moment. If we stop fighting now anything can happen."[92] In one important respect, however, the protagonists of *Yankee Stanger, Roll Shenandoah* and *Of Many Men* differ from those of *The Quiet American, DelCorso's Gallery* and *The American Blues*. The first are inspired by patriotism or idealism, and believe that there are causes worth fighting and maybe dying for. The last are convinced that every war is a disaster. They are swept away by the death-flood rising within them and on the outside world.

Fowler, the narrator of *The Quiet American*, is a variation on a character that has been found in British literature since Kipling's youthful tales of India, the white man who has "gone native." He has a Vietnamese lover, smokes opium, and cares little for his reporting job. "I once was interested myself in what for want of a better term they call news," he explains. "But grenades had staled on me . . ."[93] The United States is about to inherit France's colonial war against the Vietminh. Fowler refuses to take sides, less from professional scruples than from a weary cynicism:

> The human condition being what it was, let them fight, let them love, let them murder. I would not be involved. My fellow journalists called themselves correspondents; I preferred the title of reporter. I took no action — even an opinion is a kind of action.[94]

But, as a French pilot warns him, "We all get involved in a moment of emotion and then we cannot get out."[95] That moment occurs for Fowler when a terrorist bomb goes off in a crowded Saigon street. The resulting carnage — a woman sitting in the gutter with what is left of her baby in her lap, the twitching, legless torso of a rickshaw driver — wrings his heart.

A "quiet American," an intelligence agent named Pyle, supplied the explosives in an idealistic but misguided campaign to establish a national democratic front, a "Third Force" free from communism on the one hand and the taint of colonialism on the other. Pyle's idealism is a "kind of insanity." "He never saw anything he hadn't heard in a lecture hall," Fowler remarks, "and his writers and his lecturers made a fool of him. When he saw a dead body he couldn't even see the wounds. A Red menace, a soldier of democracy."[96] Fowler cannot expose Pyle in print, because his London newspaper is not interested in stories about the "Third Force." It is only Pyle's death that can prevent more bombings. Fowler "fingers" him for assassination by the communists. The

bystander has become a participant, and "no decision will ever be simple again."[97]

With the portrayal of Fowler, the war correspondent suddenly acquired a tortuous inner life. Fowler's motives are such a tangle that it is difficult to be sure that he acted primarily from compassion for the suffering Vietnamese. He was envious of Pyle's youth, he was bitter about Pyle stealing his mistress. The world of *The Quiet American* is a world without obvious heroes, where good motives share qualities with their opposites, and where every action, however, seemingly right or noble, casts a shadow of guilt.

A certain self-consciousness crept into the ficiton about war correspondents as it reached for greater realism. By the 1980s, the genre was almost a century old, and the writers working in it had a recognized tradition behind them that they could manipulate and, if they chose, subvert. *DelCorso's Gallery* (1983) by Philip Caputo resonates with allusions to the earlier literature. The novel's epigraph is drawn from Kipling, and its protagonist, Nick DelCorso, is a combat photographer, the modern counterpart of war artist Dick Heldar of *The Light That Failed* (1899). Furthermore, he is explicitly compared to Graham Greene, for whom "war and traveling were a drug." "You're restless the way he was," a broken-down stringer who supposedly was a buddy of the British author's back in the 1950s says.[98]

DelCorso chases from war to war in an frantic effort to exorcise his demons. Ten years previous, as an army photographer in Vietnam, he had taken pictures of American paratroopers destroying a village. He had aimed his lens as cruelly and indiscriminately as the soldiers had aimed their rifles. ". . . it was as though he had murdered [the civilians] with his camera." The bloodcurdling photographs he took that day form a private wing of "DelCorso's Gallery." He has kept them as a reminder that in war photography the "critical difference was made by the purpose in the photographer's mind, the purpose above all."[99] His overriding purpose has become to force people to look the monster of war in the face. "To seize them by the throat and scream, *This is what we are doing to each other.*" He believes that it is "his job, and every combat photographer's job, to put themselves out of business." DelCorso's colleagues jeer at his self-appointed mission. "Yeah, I know," one of them wisecracks. "You're going to take the war photograph to end all wars. Out of six thousand years of recorded history, there've been about two hundred of peace, but Nick DelCorso's going to put a stop to it with his Leica."[100]

They are perhaps right to jeer. While covering the Lebanese civil war, DelCorso photographs another massacre — this time without cruelty. The new pictues will "make the indictment he had failed to make long ago." He feels cleansed, uplifted, redeemed, only to be shot moments later by a gang of militiamen. As he lies fatally wounded in the rubble of Beirut, it "seemed he had something important to say, something he desperately needed to say." What he says is "Shit," and then he dies.[101] Kipling had invested Dick's death with an aching beauty. Caputo strips away the fabled romance of war. DelCorso's search for release ends in

obscenity and futility, the ashes of a former glory.

Like DelCorso, the narrator of Ward Just's heavily autobiographical *The American Blues* (1984), is trying to atone for his journalistic sins. He was a celebrated correspondent in Vietnam, a connoisseur of bad news, a role which gnaws at his conscience. As he puts it, "There was no equity in an agony where only the observers profited."[102] Now he is writing a history of the war, or struggling to. The last chapter, significantly, is stalled:

> I told my wife, I can't end this book.
>
> You have got to let it go, she said.
>
> The *book*? I asked incredulously. She couldn't know what she was asking.
>
> *The war*, she said furiously.[103]

But he cannot let it go, not until he fulfills his obligations to "the ghosts in the shadows," the victims of Vietnam. He must bear witness to their sacrifice. "They had given so much," he says, "and wanted so little in return; they only wanted an acknowledgment of the debt. They wanted a secure place in the public memory." And he urgently adds: "None of us must be forgotten, and in that way the future is guaranteed and our sleep untroubled." It does not seem possible, though, for this tired man to finish the task he has set himself, for him to see the war "whole and in daylight," and to describe its blood and dark rhythms. The concluding sentence of the novel, "Everything's going to work out fine," may be the supreme irony in a genre long accustomed to speaking ironically.[104]

Recent films follow much the same pattern as recent fiction in portraying journalists at the front. *Under Fire* (1983) is, in the words of its director, Roger Spottiswoode, "about the complexities of journalism, about journalists coping with the difficulties of being objective and yet having feelings and sensitivities about their subjects."[105] At the start of the movie, the correspondents appear cynical and ghoulish. Setting off to cover the 1979 Nicaraguan revolution, one of them comments, "It's a neat little war with a nice hotel." But the war turns out to be neither neat nor little, and the journalists lose all semblance of professional detachment as they get caught up in the chaos. Nick Nolte, playing a combat photographer, fakes a picture in the belief that it will help the guerrillas and reduce the bloodshed. When confronted with his action, he says, "I think I finally saw too many bodies."[106]

In another 1983 film, *The Year of Living Dangerously*, a young Australian reporter on his first overseas assignment is forced to reexamine his willingness to go to any lengths for a story. Amid the misery and unrest in Indonesia in the mid-1960s he struggles — without clear-cut results — to reconcile his career with his compassion. A similar theme is treated in *The Killing Fields*, a 1984 movie based on the experiences of Sydney Schanberg, a *New York Times* correspondent who won a Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of the war in Cambodia. Realizing that his ambition may have cost the life of his loyal interpreter, Schanberg is consumed by guilt, and begins a long dark odyssey of repentance.

Whether he seeks fame or escape or atonement on the battlefield, what the war correspondent in contemporary movies and novels finds is mass tragedy. He passes through scenes of violence, terror and suffering, and emerges from the holocaust naked and scarred. In Kipling's time, the correspondent was portrayed as a celebrator of brave deeds of war, but now he is portrayed as another of its countless casualities.

The change in image derives from changes in warfare. War has become mechanized, total and endless. World War I, which brought the efficiency of the assembly line to the act of killing, was a preview of horrors to come: the Spanish Civil War, World War II, the Korean War, the Arab-Israeli wars, the Vietnam War. And always in the background today is the shadow of nuclear war and the threat of extinction. War is the recurrent nightmare of twentieth-century man. The central message of the films and fiction of the 1980s is that no race or nation ever really wins. War wins.

Conclusion

Peace is the dream of the wise, but war is the history of man.
— Proverb

Anglo-American fiction raises disturbing questions about the life and work of war correspondents. It suggests that the reporters are frauds and thrill freaks; that they callously profit from the misery of others; that they cannot continue in their jobs without losing their essential humanity. Because it is an arena for hatred, compassion, heroism and fear, war has been considered "one of the great imaginative tests for the writer of serious fiction."[107] Stendhal, Thackery, Hugo and Tolstoy each took up the challenge. But war also has been a subject for ordinary reporters. The two traditions, literary and journalistic, flow together in the fiction about war correspondents.

The most devasting satire on war reporting, *Scoop* (1937), as well as the most discerning portrait of a war reporter, *The Quiet American* (1955), came from the pens of British authors. Overall, British fiction has depicted the "glamor boys" of journalism more incisively than American. The explanation lies in Britain's imperialistic past and its larger experience of war. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, every major London newspaper employed a regular war correspondent. Nowhere else in the world was there a comparable group of battle-hardened journalists who waited impatiently for the outbreak of war between wars. American reporting ace Richard Harding Davis acknowledged their preeminence when he said, "As our country, unlike England, is not constantly engaged in military operations, only a few of the men who acted as correspondents in the war with Spain went to the front with any previous experience of the kind of work before them."[108]

Britain's long history of colonialism gave British writers a head start in questioning the ethics of war correspondence. It was not until the Vietnam War that American writers began to seriously examine the

darker aspects of combat reporting. In no other conflict involving the United States was "the sacrifice so out of balance and the results so confounding."[109] Once irony had seemed the appropriate response to the hypocrisies and self-delusions of war correspondents, but after Vietnam and the death of innocence, irony did not suffice. The protagonists of *DelCorso's Gallery* (1983) and *The American Blues* (1984) are tragic figures who are crushed – and oh, how slowly – by the weight of their memories and moral responsibilities.

Throughout the golden age of war correspondence, there was the lingering idea that "the test and privilege of manhood was not complete, virility not yet proved, until a man had been shot at."[110] Dick Heldar of *The Light That Failed* (1899) was following a supposedly natural masculine impulse when he went out from England to accompany a British column marching to the relief of Gordon in Khartoum. That the high tension and excitement of war might get into his blood and ruin him for normal life was not a problem that occupied him. But as the scale of destruction rose with the appearance on the battlefield of machine guns, rapid-fire artillery, tanks and planes, and as the "White Man's Burden" and other rationales for imperialism fell into disrepute, it grew harder for journalists to justify their joy in campaigning. Nick DelCorso ponders whether he is "capable of going to work and then home like most men," whether he is not an action junkie:

> Action junkies were hooked on intensity of emotion they could find only in conditions of violence or danger. It was a common addiction among war photographers and correspondents; like an addiction to heroin or cocaine, the habit required ever-increasing dosages for its satisfaction, and its consequences were catastrophic: you got killed or you burned out.[111]

The war correspondent of contemporary fiction doubts the sanity and morality of his role even as he rushes off to the latest flashpoint. War for him is less and less an adventure or a crusade and more and more an unalleviated disaster. His job brings him to the dead land, the valley of ashes, the place that "you would rather not know . . . that will inhabit you . . . that you cannot imagine . . . that will finally defeat you."[112] What he sees there slashes across his eyeball like a razor.

What he sees are bombed-out cities, ragged refugees fleeing down highways, living skeletons behind the barbed wire of concentration camps, bodies tangled in mass graves. If he is going to remain human, he must shed his professional calm, stop treating the tragedy of war as just another news story, and take sides. This is the last chance for a reprieve. History is sleeping with death, and the correspondent must understand, and make others understand if he can, war as it really is, a nightmare of the lord of night, mad king of the universe, now and forever.

NOTES

1. *The Education of a Correspondent* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1946), p. 44.
2. David Brown and W. Richard Bruner, eds., A Prefatory Note to *How I Got That Story* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1967), unpaged.
3. *I Found No Peace* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1936), p. 243.
4. Literature provides more examples for analysis than either theater or film and over a longer time. I have included as an Appendix a bibliography of Anglo-American fiction about war correspondents. Most of the works are scrutinized in the text, but a few, for reasons of space and because they offer no new points to discuss, have been omitted from direct examination. Recent movies dealing with war correspondents are surveyed later in this article.
5. Angus Wilson, *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling* (New York: Viking Press, 1978), p. 144.
6. Antoinette May, *Witness to War: A Biography of Marguerite Higgins* (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 256.
7. *Dispatches* (New York: Avon Books, 1978), pp. 224, 236.
8. "The treatment of battle in fiction," military historian John Keegan has observed, "is one almost untouched by literary critics . . ." *The Face of War* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), p. 77.
9. *The Armies of the Night* (New York: New American Library, 1968), p. 245.
10. "Justification of Art," *Little Essays* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), p. 112.
11. In 1892 the great British war correspondent Archibald Forbes wrote: "I must speak mostly in the past tense of the craft of which I have been an humble follower. Not, however, because I can pursue it no more; but because its conditions are being so altered that it may be said, I fear, to have ceased to be the fine art into which zeal, energy, and contrivance elevated if for a brief term." Rather than his own master, the war correspondent of the future, Forbes predicted, "will be a mere transmitter, by strictly specified channels, of carefully revised intelligence liable to be altered, falsified, canceled, or detained at the discretion of the official set in authority over him." "War Correspondence as a Fine Art," *Century*, December 1892, p. 290.
12. Joseph P. Mathews, *Reporting the Wars* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957), p. 52.
13. *Ibid*; F. Lauriston Bullard, *Famous War Correspondents* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1914), p. 352; Robert Luther Thompson, *Wiring a Continent: The History of the Telegraph Industry in the United States, 1832-1866* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1947), pp. 217-18.
14. Rupert Furneaux, *The First War Correspondent: William Howard Russell of the Times* (London: Cassell, 1945), pp. 41,45.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
16. Louis M. Starr, *Bohemian Brigade: Civil War Newsmen in Action* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), p. 232.
17. *With My Own Eyes*, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1933), pp. 41-42.
18. *The First Casualty* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), p.44.
19. *The Notes of a War Correspondent* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), p.234.
20. Furneaux, *op. cit.*, p. 223.
21. Quoted in Furneaux, *ibid.*, pp. 29, 43.
22. *Four Years in Secessia* (Hartford, Conn.: O.D. Case, 1865; reprint edition, New York: Arno Press, 1970), pp. 16, 20.
23. Starr, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
24. Bullard, *op. cit.*, pp. 378-79.
25. *Under Fire: The Story of American War Correspondents* (New York: Messner, 1968), p. 84.
26. *With the Allies* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), pp. 222-23, 228-29.
27. *War in Korea: The Report of a Woman Combat Correspondent* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1951), p. 96.
28. Herr, *op. cit.*, p.244.
29. William A. Henry III, "Journalism Under Fire," *Time*, December 12, 1983, p. 76.
30. *Detroit Free Press*, August 25, 1984, p. 7A.

31. Mathews, *op. cit.*, p. 124
32. *The Light That Failed* (New York: H.M. Caldwell, 1899), p. 39.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 205, 340.
34. Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 148.
35. Kipling, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 115.
37. *Active Service* (New York: International Association of Newspapers and Authors, 1901), p. 120.
38. Thomas Beer, *Stephen Crane* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1923), p. 246.
39. "A Derelict," *Ransom's Folly* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904), pp. 162, 164-65.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 211-12.
42. *The Great War and Modern Memory* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 7-8.
43. George Orwell, "Rudyard Kipling," *The Orwell Reader* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1956), p. 277.
44. A.P. Taylor, quoted in Fussell, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
45. *Jaffery* (New York: John Lane, 1915), pp. 99, 158.
46. *Yankee Stranger* (Chicago: Consolidated Books, 1944), pp. 3, 82.
47. *Roll Shenandoah* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1956), pp. 8, 29, 173. Both Murray and Starr express mid-twentieth century, rather than mid-nineteenth century, journalistic notions. The news revolution burst so suddenly on editorial offices during the Civil War that conceptions of accuracy, completeness and objectivity remained largely unformulated. Junius Henri Browne, who reported the war for the *New York Tribune* acknowledged that correspondents were "compelled, from the great competition for news, to write up their accounts so rapidly, and forward them so early, that correctness of statement and excellence of style [were] often precluded." Another "special," Lorenzo L. Crounse, said competition caused "many occasions of professional sharp practices." Starr, *op. cit.*, p. 249; Browne, *op. cit.*, p. 17; Crounse, "The Army Correspondent," *Harper's Monthly*, October 1863, p. 632.
48. Thane, *op. cit.*, p. 200.
49. Lancaster, *op. cit.*, p. 307.
50. Kipling, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
51. *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.
52. "The Lone Charge of William B. Perkins," *Wounds in the Rain* (London: Methuen, 1900), pp. 33, 38, 41.
53. For further details of Davis' life and career, see Fairfax Downey, *Richard Harding Davis: His Day* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933); Gerald Langford, *The Richard Harding Davis Years: A Biography of a Mother and Son* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961).
54. *The Galloper*, in *Farces* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), p. 142.
55. Knightley, *op. cit.*, p. 181.
56. *Scoop* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977), pp. 88-89.
57. *Ibid*, p. 16.
58. *Tell Sparta* (Boston: Hougton Miflin, 1945), pp. 39, 52.
59. Kipling, *op. cit.*, pp. 236-37.
60. *Red Fleece* (New York: George H. Doran, 1915), pp. 31-32.
61. *DelCorso's Gallery* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983), p. 248.
62. *The Deserter* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917), p. 31.
63. "May Margaret," *Walking Shadows* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1918), p. 239.
64. Kipling, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
65. Waugh, *op. cit.*, p. 92-93.
66. *The Quiet American* (London: William Heinemann, 1955; reprint edition, New York: Penguin Books, 1981) p. 181.
67. Palmer, *op. cit.*, p. 340.
68. *Foreign Correspondent* (New York: Doubleday, 1957), p. 259.
69. Thane, *op. cit.*, p. 199.
70. "God Rest Ye, Merry Gentlemen," Crane, *Wounds*, pp. 105, 229.
71. Caputo, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 303 (italics in original).
73. *The American Blues* (New York: Viking Press, 1984), p. 8.
74. Keegan, *op. cit.*, pp. 240, 322.
75. Francis McCullagh, "The Question of the War Correspondent," *Contemporary Review*, CIII, February 1913, p. 203.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 209.
77. *Ibid.*
78. *20th Century Journey: The Nightmare Years, 1930-1940*, vol. 2 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984), p. 508.
79. Matthews, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
80. Comfort, *op. cit.*, p. 97.
81. Sedgwick, *op. cit.*, p. 305.
82. Herr, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
83. Just, *op. cit.*, p. 196.
84. "Reporters of the Lost War," *Esquire*, July 1984, p. 55.
85. Knightley, *op. cit.*, p. 409.
86. Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
87. Herr, *op. cit.*, p. 200.
88. Quoted in Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 55.
89. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 54.
90. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 55.
91. Vincent Sheean, *Personal History* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran, 1935), p. 25.
92. *Of Many Men* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1946), p. 305.
93. Greene, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
94. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
95. *Ibid.*, p. 152.
96. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
97. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
98. Caputo, *op. cit.*, pp. 175-76.
99. *Ibid.*, p. 223-24.
100. *Ibid.*, p. 42, 47, 62 (emphasis in original).
101. *Ibid.*, p. 333-34, 347.
102. Just, *op. cit.*, p. 66.
103. *Ibid.*, p. 15 (emphasis in original).
104. *Ibid.*, pp. 204-05.
105. Quoted in Richard Bernstein, "Issues Raised by 'Under Fire,'" Arts and Leisure, *New York Times*, October 30, 1983, p. 10.
106. For a succint, insightful discussion of recent movie portrayals of journalists, see Desmond Ryan, "The Hollywood Reporter," *Washington Journalism Review*, September 1985, pp. 45-47.
107. Michiko Kakutani, "Novelists and Vietnam: The War Goes On," *New York Times Book Review*, April 15, 1984, p. 1.
108. Quoted in Bullard, *op. cit.*, p. 409.
109. Just, *op. cit.*, p. 204.
110. Palmer, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
111. Caputo, *op. cit.*, pp. 218-19.
112. Margaret Atwood, "Notes Towards a Poem That Can Never Be Written," *True Stories* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), p. 65.

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